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ABSTRACT

To further develop a previously tested commitment analysis model for analyzing the commitments of local leaders to community education programs, telephone interviews were conducted of 272 leaders (255 men and 17 women) in a rural Wisconsin county of 30,000. The interview questions focused on their commitments to program goals in the latter programming stages of educational offerings on community land use planning, industrial development, and recreational development. The results showed that the model is not only useful for analyzing new educational situations but with some revisions is a viable model for continually guiding the analysis of educational situations. In the revised model, the behavioral commitment of community leaders toward program goals will be different at different stages of programming. Though previous research has shown static personal possession type commitments (e.g., income, education, and property investment of leaders) as more reliable predictors in early programming stages, these results indicate that the more dynamic behavioral commitments (e.g., earliness of involvement, hours involved in programs, and amount of perceived contact) are stronger predictors in latter stages of programming. These findings suggest that adult educators must continually observe and analyze the situation throughout a community educational program to be fully aware of existing needs, possible barriers, and/or ways to facilitate the program. (EM)

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COMMUNITY LEADERS' COMMITMENTS TO PROGRAMS: DO THEY CHANGE DURING A PROGRAM?

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ABSTRACT

This study conceptualized and tested additions to a model for analyzing community educational situations. According to new results, a revised model also fits latter stages of educational programs. In the revised model, the behavioral commitments of community leaders which predict their probable commitment to program goals will be different at different stages of programming. Though previous research has shown static personal possession type commitments (income, education, property investment of leaders) as more realible predictors in early programming stages, analysis of 272 leaders' responses in a more recent random survey found that the more dynamic behavioral commitments (earliness of involvement, hours involved in programs, amount of perceived contact, etc.) are stronger predictors in latter stages of programming. These findings suggest that adult educators must continually observe and analyze the situation throughout a community educational program to be fully aware of existing needs, possible barriers, and/or ways to facilitate the program.

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COMMUNITY LEADERS' COMMITMENTS TO PROGRAMS: DO THEY CHANGE DURING A PROGRAM?

THE PROBLEM

Previous research by Forest (8) showed that certain public overt commitments of community leaders within their local communities were related to their commitments to community education program goals. More specifically, the static, long term, socio-economic commitments, such as property investment, organization memberships, and reputation for leadership, were more strongly correlated with commitments to program goals than were the process, short term behavioral (social-psychological) commitments, such as public interaction with the goals, organizational participation, and issue-related communications with non-local people. This research recommended that adult educators seriously consider these relationships as they analyze new program situations, determine needs and barriers to programs, and plan appropriate programs. Knowing these relationships between commitments would help adult educators to predict the likely acceptance of or resistance to the program, and also its eventual value to the community and leaders.

However, the development of the model was limited to survey data collected and analyzed during the pre-programming stage. The selected goals and issues were relatively new (less than 1 year

old) to the community and leaders. The leaders had little opportunity to interact with each other about the proposed goals. This follow-up research questioned whether the relationships between leaders' commitments remain the same at later stages of programming. How dynamic are community educational program situations? Do the relationships between commitments found at early program stages remain or disappear? Or do different relationships develop to necessitate continuous reassessment and analysis of educational situations? Answers to these questions would not only extend or build upon the model developed and tested earlier; they would also provide practical implications for how community adult educators implement and follow-up their programs.

THEORETEICAL BACKGROUND

The Loomis (10) social system model served as a starting point for developing a model to analyze the commitment of leaders in program situations. The Loomis model incorporates and defines the dynamic processes of situations and relates them to those situations' more static existing structures. It thus serves as an overall framework to increase the probability that all facets of a community are analyzed when determining educational needs and appropriate strategies for a situations.

However, because the Loomis model incorporates both static (socio-economic or base of power) elements and dynamic (social-

psychological or means of power) processes related to those static elements, it also relates to the problems addressed in this follow-up research -- are program situations static or dynamic? For instance, power is complimented by the processes of decision-making and initiating action. Beliefs are complimented by learning, goals by goal-attaining, facilities by use of facilities, and so on.

In the previous research, both static and dynamic commitments of local leaders correlated to their commitments to program goals. However, the static commitments as a cluster, including variables such as amount of reputational power and property investment of leaders, correlated more strongly with leaders' commitments to the goals than did the process commitments cluster, including interaction on the goals, amount of influence exerted, etc. These realtionships were expected, since previous commitments of leaders were of longer duration, more public, and more irreversible than their more recent actions related to the newly proposed community program goals. These previous findings led to the commitment analysis model as shown in Figure 1. Specific commitments are listed within the two types of commitments. The width of arrows indicates that socio-economic commitments are more likely to be correlated with attitudes toward new educational programs.

Fig. 1. Commitment Analysis Model. Interrelationships of Commitments and Attitudes Toward New Educational Programs

A review of literature suggests the model may also fit latter stages of educational programs given further development and testing. However, this review suggests different relationships will be found in latter stages of programming after leaders have had more opportunity for making social-psychological commitments.

Dewey (4) states that a person's goals evolve from his actions. A goal does not really belong to an individual unless it is anchored in his own experiences. Thus, with little opportunity for experience related to a particular goal, a community leader is very likely to use his longer duration, static commitments to perceive goals and commit himself to them. Once an educational program is implemented, however, the leader has more opportunity for additional experiences related to the goals, along with the chance to clarify and evolve his commitments to those goals. These additional experiences may thus change the nature of the relationships between certain commitments. Public commitments and behaviors within these more recent experiences may be more likely to correlate with his goal commitments than the static commitments.

Festinger (5) followed by many others (Aronson (1), Bramel (2), Chapanis and Chapanis (3), Festinger (6), Festinger and Aronson (7)) argue that one's beliefs are brought into agreement with one's outward public behaviors as a way of reducing cognitive dissonance whenever one's public behavior differs from one's

internal attitudes and beliefs. Kiesler (9) says that the more visible and overt one's behavior and personal involvement is with an object, the greater the commitment to that object.

Dissonance theory also suggests that higher correlations might be likely between process (behavioral) commitments and commitments to program goals than between static personal commitments and goal commitments. This would be expected particularly when these commitments are determined at later stages of community educational programs after leaders have opportunities to learn about the goals and implications. They will also have more opportunity to clarify their commitments, participate in public actions (process commitments) related to goal achievement, and thus further develop their commitments to the community goals.

Thus, in further development and testing of the commitment analysis model, the following hypotheses were tested:

1. Rural community leaders' commitments to programs will be positively related to their static commitments, during and after educational program implementation.
2. Rural community leaders' commitments to programs will be positively related to their process commitments during and after educational program implementation.
3. The process commitments of leaders will be more related to commitments to programs than their static commitments during and after educational program implementation.

PROCEDURES AND METHODOLOGY

The hypotheses were tested in a rural Wisconsin county of approximately 30,000 with the largest city of 6,000 population. This county provided an appropriate setting for testing the hypotheses since the topics of its educational programs were closely parallel to those in the previous study. For instance, the University of Wisconsin had actively provided educational activities on community land use planning, industrial development, and recreational development for 10 to 15 years in the selected county.

As in the previous research, community and county leaders were selected as the population for study because of research (Forest (8), Powers (11)) showing them to be the primary actors on community level problems and decisions. Using positional and reputational leadership identification procedures, 320 county and community leaders were identified as the study population.

Attitude intensities (Forest (8)) toward three programs were determined as measurements of commitments to community program goals. The three programs were directed toward the issues of land use planning, industrial development, and outdoor recreation development. These three programs varied in their time length, potential controversy, number of people involved, level of group effort necessary, and geographic location. In all three, local autonomy, local control, and local responsibility were important to deal with the related issues.

Three Likert attitude scales were developed, pre-tested, and used to measure attitude intensities. Item analysis determined that the reliability coefficients were low but minimally acceptable (.69, .78, .80) on each of the three scales. Scoring procedures were identical to previous work.

The concept of static commitments was measured by five socio-economic characteristics of leaders:

1. Annual income in dollars
2. Leaders' property investment in dollars
3. Length of community tenure in years
4. Reputational leadership by number of mentions
5. Number of key organizational memberships

The concept of process commitments was measured by five social-psychological characteristics of leaders:

1. Amount of perceived contact with program
2. Earliness of involvement with program
3. Degree to which still involved in program
4. Hours per week involved with program
5. Amount of participation in organizations related to programs

The interview schedule randomly selected one third of the leaders to answer questions related to each of the three programs. The significance level of .05 and a minimum of .250 r were selected as points of hypothesis acceptance.

RESULTS

Two hundred and seventy two (or an 85% response rate) of the 320 identified leaders were interviewed by telephone. Of the 255 men and 17 women, 91% perceived themsleves involved in community affairs at that time. They averaged 51.3 years of age, 12.8 years of education, $13,760 annual income, 41.3 years of local residence, and 1.2 memberships in community organizations.

With possible scores of 0-18, the land use commitment scores ranged from 4-16 with a mean of 9.6. The recreation commitments ranged from 0-17 with a mean of 8.3. The industrial development commitments were from 7-17 with a mean of 10.2.

The hypotheses were tested by determining if Pearson zero order correlations between the three attitude intensity scores and the process and static commitments met established significance levels. Table 1 summarizes the correlations between static commitment variables and attitude intensities toward programs. As the table shows, no correlations met the established minimums. Very little relationship existed between the static commitments and leaders' commitments to the three community programs after substantial educational activities. Another interesting point in Table 1 is the relatively higher correlation between length of community tenure and commitment toward industrial development.

TABLE 1
CORRELATIONS BETWEEN ATTITUDE INTENSITIES (COMMITMENTS) TO PROGRAMS AND STATIC COMMITMENTS

The -.277 r was significant at the .05 level but not in the predicted direction. Thus, based on data in Table 1, hypothesis one was rejected. At later stages of educational programming related to a community issue, leaders' static socio-economic commitments do not relate to their current commitments to program goals.

Table 2 presents a summary of correlations between leaders' dynamic process (social-psychological behavior) commitments and their commitments to the program goals. As the summary shows, all but three correlations met the level of .05 significance. All but five met the minimum: .250 r.

TABLE 2
CORRELATIONS BETWEEN ATTITUDE INTENSITIES (COMMITMENTS) TO PROGRAMS AND PROCESS COMMITMENTS

Considering the predominance of statistically significant and .250 or higher correlations in Table 2, hypothesis two was accepted. Process commitments made by leaders during a community educational program do predict their commitments to the community goals to which educational efforts have been directed.

The testing of hypothesis three was central to this research on the commitment analysis model. In part, a comparison of Table 1 and 2 might lead to a conclusion. However, to test hypothesis three, multiple correlations were used. This procedure determined which cluster of commitments (static or dynamic) would predict more variance in the dependent variables: commitments to

the program, while eliminating spurious relationships due to inter-relationships of the independent variables.

As Table 3 shows, none of the Multiple "R's" are exceptionally high. Only one is above .500. Thus independent variables within each cluster are interrelated. For instance, a person with a high income is also likely to have property investments. A leader reporting high perceived contact with programs would likely report several hours of involvement per week.

TABLE 3
MULTIPLE CORRELATIONS BETWEEN COMMITMENT
(STATIC CLUSTER AND PROCESS CLUSTER) AND
THE DEPENDENT VARIABLES (ATTITUDE INTENSITIES) TOWARD PROGRAMS

Nevertheless, an examination of R's in Table 3 shows several interesting points. First, the highest R's are found in the process column two out of three times and in the predicted direction. Based on this finding, hypothesis three is accepted. Publicly observable, process commitments which may accrue during an educational program relate more strongly to commitments to program goals than do leaders' static commitments which more likely accrue prior to a program.

The one exception involves the industrial development program. In retrospect, static commitments relative to that program might correlate higher. Leaders with long term commitments, such as property investments, are more likely to be committed to such a goal regardless of whether or not they are active in meetings or

other processes of educational programs. Industrial development is likely a direct extension of prior existing economic commitments. But land use planning and recreation development education are very dynamic types of programs allowing involvement by all socio-economic levels and thus allowing for the probability that process commitments made during a program will realte more to commitments to program goals.

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

The results and conclusions were determined in the same type of community situation as in previous research, except for the stage of program at which measurements were made. Many uncontrollable variables, such as the difference in community histories, issues, and adult educators, obviously affected the results. However, the research did not pursue the effects of these factors. Instead, it focused on the interrelationships of commitments on locally controlled issues for which educational programs were designed. Recognizing these limits and the necessity for further research to control these intervening variables, the following conclusions were reached.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Static, socio-economic commitments of leaders do not relate to commitments to program goals after substantial educational programming.

2. Process or social-psychological commitments of community leaders do relate to commitments to program goals after substantial educational programming.
3. Process commitments are more crucial than static commitments in predicting the level of leaders' commitments to program goals after substantial programming.
4. The Commitment Analysis Model is not only useful for analyzing new educational situations but is a viable model for continually guiding analysis of educational situations when these results are used to make additions to it.

IMPLICATIONS

Measurements used for this analysis were from a different time period during the program. Nothing in these data suggest that results from the original research on relationships between commitments at the beginning of programs were in error. The modification suggested by the results of the latest analysis deals with a situation different from the one to which the original model applied: "new" program situations in which leaders are not experienced with proposed goals.

Figure 2 represents the Commitment Analysis Model with the revisions making it applicable to latter stages of educational programs.

Fig. 2. Commitment Analysis Model (Revised).

Figure 2 shows that static leader commitments are more crucial predictors of commitments to program goals at initial stages of programs, and thus more critical to an adequate analysis and understanding of the program situations at that time. Such early analysis can indicate to an adult educator where possible community support for a program exists or where possible obstacles and resistance might lie. However, after a program is legitimized, planned, and partially conducted, the process commitments, leaders publicly make during the program, are increasingly related to commitments to program goals and thus more crucial to accurate assessment and understanding of the educational situation. The educational situation is dynamic and changing. Publicly observable behavior on the part of participants in an ongoing program create new public commitments which can either facilitate or block the educational program related to the issues. Educators cannot assess a situation, determine needs, set objectives, design a program, and implement it in a rigid sequential order. Instead the results and additions to the earlier model suggest that adult educators must continually observe the behaviors and expressions of leaders as they become involved in the program. The time at which leaders become involved, the number of hours per week they give to community educational programs, and the types of actions they take are direct indicators of their support and commitment to the goals.

These behaviors cannot be taken into account until they've happened but when they do occur, they replace the static commitments as crucial indicators of the program situation. These findings suggest that programs ought to be planned to allow for and expect further planning. These results also imply that the criteria, or bases on which programs are evaluated, are also more dynamic than the originally established goals, particularly when the commitments of program participants are considered.

In conclusion, these data and implications raise very serious questions for both research and practitioners:

1. To what extent can planning in initial stages of adult educational programs be specific and final, and still be functional?
2. What are the appropriate levels of generality for initial planning of various types of community educational programs?
3. Are certain leaders more crucial to initial phases of community educational programs and different leaders more crucial to program success in latter stages of programming?
4. Should planning (decision-making) be more integral to the implementation of programs than proposed by many traditional educational program models?
5. Can evaluation of programs be based on the original

goals established in initial program stages, or does the value of a program rest more on dynamic processes which give rise to different commitments (indicators of value) and program goals?

6. Can adult educators facilitate more processes which allow participants to clarify and develop stronger commitments toward program goals?

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TABLE 1

CORRELATIONS BETWEEN ATTITUDE INTENSITIES (COMMITMENTS) TO PROGRAMS AND STATIC COMMITMENTS

Program Commitments	Static Commitments				
	Income	Investment	Tenure	Reputational Leadership	Key Membership
Land Use Planning	.155	.021	.090	.140	-.003
Industrial Development	-.064	-.083	-.277*	.061	.163
Outdoor Recreation Development	.073	.118	.088	.054	.200

* not in predicted direction but over .250 level

TABLE 2
CORRELATIONS BETWEEN ATTITUDE INTENSITIES (COMMITMENTS)
TO PROGRAMS AND PROCESS COMMITMENTS

Program Commitments	Process Commitments				
	Perceived Amount of Contact	Earliness of Contact	Degree Still Involved	Hours Per Week of Greatest Involvement	Relevant Organizational Participation
Land Use Planning	.411**	.221*	.209*	.509**	.362**
Industrial Development	.250**	.294**	.257**	.199	.122
Outdoor Recreational Development	.361**	.017	.391**	.354**	.405**

*Significant at .05 level

**Significant at .05 level but also meets minimum level of .250 r acceptance

TABLE 3

MULTIPLE CORRELATIONS BETWEEN COMMITMENT (STATIC CLUSTER AND PROCESS CLUSTER) AND THE DEPENDENT VARIABLES (ATTITUDE INTENSITIES) TOWARD PROGRAMS

Program Commitment	Commitment Clusters	
	Static	Process
Land Use Planning	.279	.525*
Industrial Development	.361*	.318
Outdoor Recreation	.320	.433*

*Exceeds "R" found in other column

Fig. 1. Commitment Analysis Model. Interrelationships of Commitments and Attitudes Toward New Educational Programs

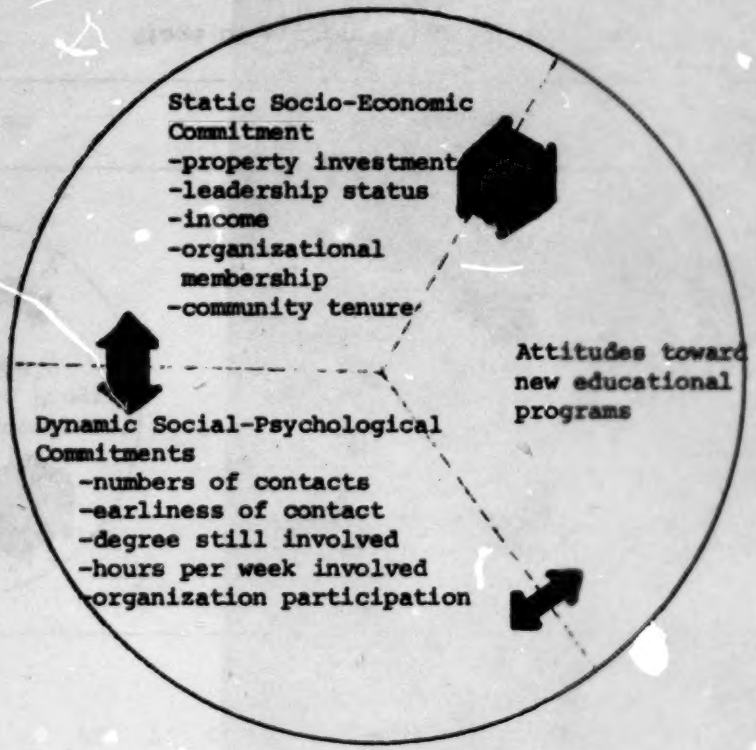

Fig. 2. Commitment Analysis Model (Revised)